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Alter Nicaragua policy, Lugar urges Reagan

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WASHINGTON — The incoming chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee urged President Reagan yesterday to reverse course and pressure the rebels in Nicaragua to halt efforts to overthrow the leftist Sandinista government.

Republican Sen. Richard G. Lugar of Indiana proposed a diplomatic formula under which Nicaragua's Sandinista leaders, in exchange, would pledge to halt aid to guerrillas in surrounding nations, particularly El Salvador, and agree "not to establish a Soviet base."

Asked what the United States would offer in exchange, Lugar said: "I suppose right now they [the Sandinistas] want a cessation [of rebel attacks] and that would probably be what they would get. In other words, we would attempt to guarantee that they, too, would not be destabilized by others."

He predicted that the new Congress, which convenes next month, would not approve aid to the CIA-backed *contra* rebels in Nicaragua, except to help interdict supplies to adjoining Central American countries.

In an interview with news-agency reporters, he also said he could see no circumstances under which U.S. military forces would fight in Central America.

"There isn't any consensus for sending troops to any Central American country," he said.

He also argued that the United States should consider funneling foreign aid through private groups in other nations, rather than to governments. Such a move, he contended, could better stimulate the economies of some developing nations.

"Private institutions in many cases would likely make better use of the money for economic growth as opposed to using the money for the political purposes of those in power,"

Lugar said.

He indicated that some governments were more interested in keeping themselves in power than using U.S. aid to improve the economic situation of their people.

Lugar described the proposal as "radical," but said "we probably need to be thinking a good bit more about where we can direct shipments to private agencies or companies or individuals to see if we can get the sparks going of an enterprise economy."

Commenting on the possibility of any military involvement abroad, Lugar, generally a strong supporter of the administration, said the United States should move very carefully before taking either retaliatory moves against terrorists or sending American troops into foreign wars.

When terrorists strike, Lugar said, "the question comes down to adequate intelligence, so that we have the very best evidence of who did what and where they are located."

"Without that, retaliation is likely to take on a random character which is unacceptable to the American people," he said.

There is always a risk that U.S. retaliation "escalates to potential additional steps by people you retaliate against," he added.

Generally, Lugar adopted the philosophy of Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger, who has listed six conditions under which U.S. forces could be used, including the full support of the American people and the likelihood of military success.

Lugar said he was not choosing sides in the debate between Weinberger and Secretary of State George P. Shultz, who has argued that the United States should answer terrorism with quick, precise military attacks.

Generally, Lugar said, "I would not be in favor of starting out paramilitary operations in a deliberate attempt to destabilize other nation states."